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## A COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER'S QUALIFICATIONS TO ENTER THE WORK FORCE: THE FREQUENCY AND DISTRIBUTION OF REQUIREMENTS

Alison N. Berry, University of Kansas

*This article examines the frequency and distribution of requirements placed on communication managers within recruitment advertisements. The characteristics of recruitment advertisements seeking entry to mid-level communications managers within the Midwest region of the United States were divided into several categories including years of experience, formal education, and educational accreditation status. These categories were analyzed to identify trends and produce conclusions. The conclusions presented with the article indicate employers seek well-rounded and multi-faceted candidates, but overlook educational accreditation as a prerequisite for employment. Additionally, the article evidences both formal education and years of experience as an enhancement to a job seeker's qualifications within workforce. The results of the current study prove valuable in providing information about the field of communications, the job market, general hiring processes, and the workforce. This article recommends further research in job market analysis with emphasis on educational accreditation and its impact on the workforce, job market, and economy.*

Currently, the United States faces a plethora of problems arising from the development, mass marketing, and integration of diploma mills and unaccredited institutions into American culture. These institutions, which produce "graduates" with little valuable education, have led employers to adopt new hiring processes to ensure a qualified applicant is offered the available position (Department of Education [DoE], 2011). Therefore, it becomes ever more important to study how employers view formal education, how institutional accreditation impacts students' education and job opportunities, and how the job market is affected by under and unqualified job seekers entering the workforce. This article analyzes the current job market by examining the requirements communications managers face when entering the workforce, specifically focusing on experience and educational requirements. These requirements reveal much about the priorities of hiring corporations and important areas of consideration for potential employees.

### ACCREDITATION, JOB MARKET ANALYSIS AND THE COMMUNICATIONS MAJOR: A REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Educational accreditation receives much attention by researchers and these findings produce valuable information regarding how students, institutions, professors, and employers are influenced by accreditation agencies. Likewise, literature on the status of the current job market within the United States offers important information regarding where potential applicants should focus their energies and how employers evaluate recent graduates from the higher educational system. Combined, this research produces insight into how employers and employees are affected recruitment advertisement requirements. However, there is a gap in literature linking the concepts of formal education, educational accreditation and employment within the United States.

### Accreditation within the United States

Accrediting agencies are defined as "private educational associations of regional or national scope that develop evaluation criteria and conduct peer evaluations to assess whether or not those criteria are met" (DoE, 2011, para. 1). Therefore, accreditation is the system through which higher educational institutions within the United States are monitored for quality assurance. Indeed, without institutional accreditation, an institution of higher education is not regulated or held to any normative ethical standard, as discussed by J.S. Eaton (2010) in his examination of the future of higher education within the United States. Therefore, graduates must be produced from accredited institutions in order for employers to value students' education, which is evidenced in an article by J.F. Wergen (2005) examining how accreditation adds worth to a higher education. Indeed, employers seeking to hire recent graduates consider this information and assess a job seeker's education based upon accreditation and the standards to which the applicant was held throughout his or her academic career. Likewise, employers are not likely to hire individuals whose education was authenticated by a diploma mill (DoE, 2011).

A diploma mill, otherwise known as a degree mill, is defined by the DoE (2011) as "an institution of higher education operating without supervision of a state or professional agency and granting diplomas which...because of the lack of proper standards [are] worthless (para. 2)." Furthermore, diploma mills are "schools that are more interested in taking money than providing quality education" (DoE, 2011, para. 3). With the proliferation of diploma mills and non-accredited higher educational institutions, the DoE (2011) has taken action under the Higher Education Opportunity Act, with the help of the Better Business Bureau, against thousands of institutions now recognized as diploma mills. Additionally, the DoE (2011) believes employers now seek applicants only from accredited



institutions, particular colleges, or specific programs to avoid hiring unqualified personnel.

### **Job Market Analysis**

Many researchers study the hiring process and have, collectively, mapped much of the human resource expectations in a variety of fields. Gurumurthy and Kleiner (2002) examined several important characteristics of the hiring practices in all organizations. They found the initial screening process, or the review of a candidate's paper credentials, was of great importance to a successful hire and the most necessary components of a successful recruitment advertisement included experience, education, and overall intelligence. Similarly, Wu and Li (2008) identified the most common attribute of recruitment advertisements was experience in the field and were able to provide those entering the work force with information regarding exactly what employer expectations were of potential medical librarians.

Moreover, researchers from a variety of technical fields have conducted studies providing information to graduates concerning employers' expectations which create informative employment outlooks. For example, Van Dussen's (2008) study of the job outlook for the field of gerontology provided insight to recent graduates about the current status of this career field. Love, Haynes and Irani (2001) completed a similar study for the field of construction management providing information to both graduates and employers concerning the level of education and years of experience required to obtain a position in this field. Finally, Hillmer and Kocabasoglu (2008) conducted a study examining the processes through which higher educational institutions acquire knowledge of employer expectations of graduates. However, the study does not provide conclusive evidence regarding employer requirements in any particular field which reflects the current trend in arts and humanities career related literature. Therefore, information about the employment outlook in the fields of arts and humanities must be gathered in order to provide crucial knowledge to graduates, colleges, universities, and employers.

### **The Communications Major**

In order to gather pertinent information about the job market, this article seeks to address the gap in literature concerning the communications major and the subsequently hired managers in possession of these degrees. The communications major, as a division of the arts and humanities segment of higher education, focuses on interpersonal and organization communication with special emphasis on public address and rhetorical criticism. This area of study reflects what is occurring in other areas of the arts and humanities sector as it responds to the needs of professionals in all areas of concentration (Trent, 1999). However, the communications major does not typically

require graduates to seek certification or licensure, as is the case with technical degrees. Therefore, graduates of this particular major rely heavily on the higher educational institution for reputability, as no other external or formal body verifies the education received by the student after graduation (Turner, 2004).

Currently, the unemployment rate for recent communications graduates of an undergraduate degree program is 7.40% which is 1.5% less than the comprehensive unemployment rate for all recent Bachelor's degree holders. This unemployment rate is increased due, in part, to the lack of exclusive jobs for graduates from this particular major as graduates from other areas may also fill available positions. Additionally, undergraduates from this field can expectedly earn \$34,000 per year which is \$14,000 less than the average earnings for Bachelor's degree holders. It is important to note unemployment in the field of communications decreases to 4.3%, compared to 3% comprehensively, and the expected wage increases to \$65,000, compared to \$62,000 comprehensively, when the sample is reduced to exclusively graduate degree holders (Carnevale, Cheah, and Strohl, 2012). However, it is not determined if these statistics are correlated with experience, education or another external factor. The current study seeks to reduce this uncertainty.

### **PURPOSE, HYPOTHESES & PROCEDURES**

In order to better understand how employers view formal education, years of experience, and educational accreditation, this article seeks to answer several questions not yet resolved by current research. By answering these questions, employers and job-seekers gain insight into the job market. Additionally, when these requirements are analyzed they provide practical conclusions regarding the values and needs of employers.

#### **Purpose**

This article seeks to answer the following question: "How does formal education affect a communications manager's job prospects?" The answer to this question could reveal information about how the extrinsic value of accreditation is manifested within the job market, which could also provide a more practical definition of educational accreditation's value in the workforce. Therefore, the answer may allow potential employees to understand the amount of energy which should be concentrated into possessing and conveying both their level of formal education and their educational institutions' accreditation status. Additionally, the answer could be extrapolated, indicating the overall values held by employers concerning formal education within the United States.

This article also seeks to answer the following question: "How does experience in the field of communications/management affect a communications manager's job



prospects?" In the same way as formal education, the value of experience in the field of communications could be more accurately defined when this question is answered. Additionally, potential employees could gain an understanding of how job experience is valued when contrasted with formal education. Combined with the first question, this information could present a comprehensive analysis of the current job market for communications managers and employer values within the industry.

### Hypotheses

Based on the previous studies discussed in the literature review, several trends emerged which are reflected in the hypotheses of this study. Through investigational research methods, the current study seeks to affirm or deny the following hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 1:** Within a recruitment advertisement, an employer will require a specific level of formal education.

Employers often require a specific level of formal education in other fields (Van Dussen, 2008; Love, Haynes and Irani, 2001). Therefore, the field of communications is expected to mirror the other previously analyzed fields. Employers seeking to hire a communications manager will probably indicate a specific degree level an applicant must have obtained prior to applying for the listed position.

**Hypothesis 2:** Within a recruitment advertisement, an employer will require an applicant have a specific amount of experience in the field.

In addition to formal education, employers have historically required applicants to have a certain amount of time in the field of which they are seeking employment (Van Dussen, 2008; Love, Haynes and Irani, 2001). Therefore, the field of communications is expected to mirror other previously analyzed fields. Employers will probably indicate a specific number of years an applicant must have spent in the field prior to applying for the listed position.

**Hypothesis 3:** Within a recruitment advertisement, an employer will require the education of an applicant be from an accredited institution.

Based upon the information in the literature review, employers will expectedly seek applicants only from accredited institutions (DoE, 2011; Eaton, 2010). Therefore, recruitment advertisements will probably indicate a specific accreditation standard to which an applicant's education must adhere.

### Procedures

In order to identify trends and patterns occurring within a sample, frequency techniques are often employed. A frequency analysis divides a multivariate situation into its subparts which are categorized and counted. These categories create separate quantitative analyses which can be interpreted, analyzed and associated in order to draw conclusions about the sample (Dixon and Massey 1957; Huntsberger, 1961; Kenney and Keeping, 1962; Alder and Roessler, 1964). Frequency analysis can be summarized into five practical steps: collection of raw data, determine the range, divide the range into categories, assign raw data to the determined categories as counts, and calculate the absolute, relative and cumulative frequencies (Fowler and Perez, 1999). Cumulatively, these steps create a frequency distribution which produces a summarized grouping of data divided into mutually exclusive classes. Frequency distributions are then presented in contingency tables using cross tabulation or through cumulative frequency plots. The results produced by frequency analyses provide insight into the overall characteristics and defining attributes of a sample (Schmid, 1983).

These techniques were used to analyze electronically indexed recruitment advertisements for entry to mid-level positions at various organizations in the Midwest for educational level, educational accreditation, and experience requirements. Quantitatively, each recruitment advertisement in this article offered data categorized through raw numbers and criterion. Specifically, years of experience are evaluated in terms of raw numbers, with each year required recorded as a count of one (1). These numbers were then assessed for frequency and analyzed in terms of mean, median, and mode. Additionally, it was important to investigate the years of experience as differentiated by patterns and trends. Therefore, each recruitment advertisement was also analyzed by state and urbanization in a cumulative frequency plot. Urbanization was evaluated and categorized using the United States Census Bureau's (2012) three category method: urban area, urban place, and rural place/territory.

Formal education level and accreditation are analyzed in terms of category data. Formal education level is divided into four classifications: "Bachelor," for recruitment advertisements indicating a need for a completed formal bachelor's degree; "BA or Equivalent," for recruitment advertisements indicating a need for a completed formal bachelor's degree or experience providing the equivalent knowledge; "High School," for recruitment advertisements indicating a need for a high school diploma or GED and "None," for recruitment advertisements not indicating a specific level of formal education desired. Accreditation is analyzed in terms of "yes/no" criterion, with "yes" indicating the recruitment advertisement required a specific educational accreditation and "no" indicating the recruitment



advertisement does not require a specific educational accreditation. The raw data is provided in the Appendix.

### Sample

Multiple electronic databases were analyzed to obtain the findings presented within this article. The recruitment advertisement must have included both the words "communication" and "manager" to be returned by the query and, therefore, to be included within this study. This is a commonly accepted practice in both research and active job hunts as described by Jansen, Jansen, and Spink (2005) in a review of relevant research practices. Furthermore, the article examines recruitment advertisements seeking applicants in the Midwest region of the United States (i.e. Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin), exclusively. Additionally, the current analysis utilizes recruitment advertisements for mid to entry level management positions. Fifty-one total recruitment advertisements were evaluated in this study. A detailed listing of the sample is provided in the Appendix.

### FINDINGS

The first stage of analysis begins with a review of the comprehensive findings, which produced several key results. Figures 1 through 3 present the comprehensive results of the current study, with Figure 1 representing the education required for hire as a communications manager within the Midwest. Employers generally require an applicant to hold a bachelor's degree (BA), as approximately 82% of the listings require this level of formal education. Furthermore, 12% of employers required either a BA or the experience equivalent to this level of formal education. Combined, these two categories represent 94% of the comprehensive sample. As only 6% of employers did not require a formal education past the high school level, this indicates a strong employer preference for a post-secondary education. It is important to note, while several recruitment advertisements mentioned a preference for a master's degree (MA), no single listing required the applicant hold a MA or higher.

FIGURE 1

The Formal Education Required by the Comprehensive Sample of Recruitment Advertisements

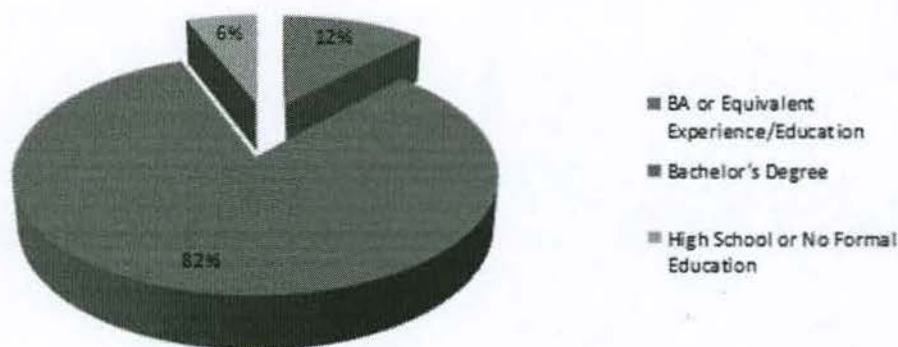


Figure 2 presents the number of years required to obtain a communications manager position within the Midwest. In conjunction with the years of experience, positions for entry to mid-level communications managers generally require four to seven years of experience. Indeed, five years of

experience is the most commonly required number of years, as it represents 31% of the sample and is both the mean and median number of required years for the comprehensive sample.

FIGURE 2

The Years of Experience Required by the Comprehensive Sample of Recruitment Advertisements

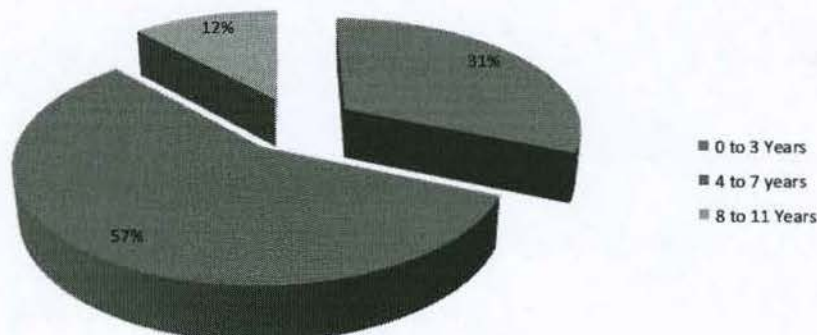


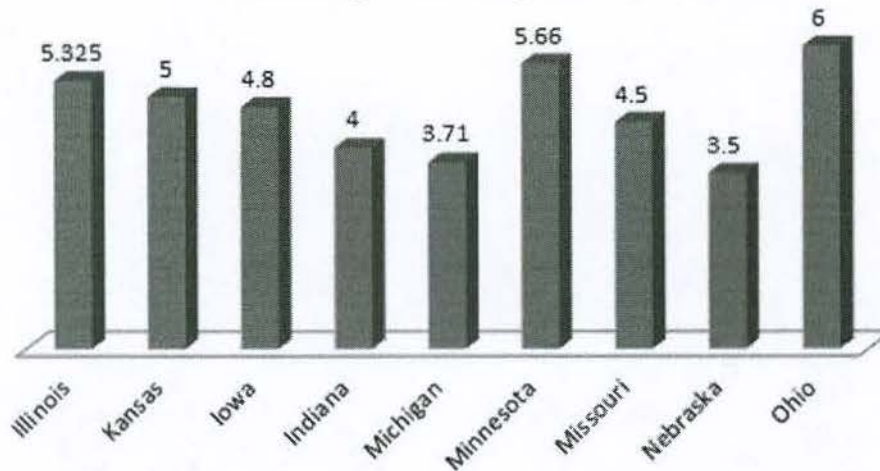


Figure 3 represents the years of experience required by employers, as categorized by state. Ohio, which requires an average of six years of experience, demands the most experience of job-seekers. Contrastingly, Nebraska requires the fewest years of experience with an average of only three and a half years required to gain employment. However, with a spread of only two and a half years, there is little

difference across the analyzed states. It is important to note Chicago, Illinois is the most represented city with approximately 19.2% of all jobs located in this particular city. Between states, there is no significant difference in the amount of formal education required to qualify for a communications manager's position, as indicated in Figure 1.

FIGURE 3

### The Average Years of Experience by State



In addition to state categorization, years of experience was also categorized by urbanization. The data reflected the presence of two types of urbanization as indicated by job location: urban area and urban place. Urban areas, locations with a population of 50,000 or more, typically require five years of experience as this was the mean, median, and mode for the data. Similarly, recruitment advertisements in urban places, locations with a population of 2,500 to 50,000, typically required five years of experience but this was only the mean and median for this data. The mode for urban places was approximately three years of experience.

Finally, no employer seeking a communications manager in the Midwest indicates a requirement for educational accreditation possessed by the potential employee within the recruitment advertisement. The only qualifier indicated by employers regarding formal education is the area of study in which the bachelor's degree is held.

### CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS & PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

The findings of this article indicate employers have a strong desire to ensure potential employees have a background in the field of the communications before entering the workforce. The recruitment advertisements employers develop are designed, in part, to ensure applicants understand what the position requires. The results of this

article support this mission and have an impact on the way students, employers, job seekers and the educational industry should view years of experience, formal education, and accreditation with relationship to the current job market.

### Conclusions

An analysis of the findings presents clear conclusions regarding the hypotheses analyzed by the investigational research methods utilized within this study. Each hypothesis analyzed was affirmed or denied based on the findings presented within this article. The assessment of each hypothesis offers key insight into recruitment advertisements and the initial screening processes of employers.

*H1: Within a recruitment advertisement, an employer will require a specific level of formal education.*

Employers do not dismiss formal education as a necessarily element to an applicant's background because they require a specific level of formal education within recruitment advertisements and, therefore, this hypothesis is affirmed. A bachelor's degree is required for nearly all positions which indicate employers place value on a certain level of formal education granted within the higher educational system of the United States. Additionally, relatively few employers indicated a requirement for a "BA



or equivalent” which further indicates formal education as a necessary component to an applicant’s background.

*H2: Within a recruitment advertisement, an employer will require an applicant have a specific amount of experience in the field.*

Employers frequently listed a specific number of years of experience required of an applicant before hire and, therefore, this hypothesis is affirmed. Additionally, this solidifies the trend identified in the literature review. Therefore, when determining a job-seeker’s ability during the initial screening process, employers focus on the skills on-the-job training brings to applicant’s knowledge base. As evidenced by this analysis, employers believe multiple years of experience allow a candidate to gain the necessary skills required to succeed in a management position.

Although not true in all fields previously analyzed in job market studies, these two affirmed hypotheses indicate employers value a well-rounded and multi-faceted background in potential communications managers. Because nearly all of the recruitment advertisements require formal education and years of experience, these employers believe these characteristics allow a potential employee the opportunity to gain knowledge in several areas which can be applied to a position in communications management.

*H3: Within a recruitment advertisement, an employer will require the education of an applicant be from an accredited institution.*

Educational accreditation is not recognized as a prerequisite for hire during the initial application screening for communications managers and, therefore, this hypothesis is denied. While many educational institutions, as well as the Department of Education, assert educational accreditation as a requirement to ensure a graduate has received an exemplary education, employers do not recognize educational accreditation as being a key factor to determining the ability of a potential employee during the initial screen process (DoE, 2011). However, this does not necessarily imply a flaw in the conclusions found by the aforementioned literature. The results of this study only indicate educational accreditation is not currently required during the initial application review.

### Recommendations for Further Research

Although this research indicates educational accreditation is not required to pass the initial screening process for communications managers, this may not remain true for other fields or farther into the applicant screening process. In order to better understand how educational accreditation impacts a job seeker’s potential hire, researchers are encouraged to develop studies in which multiple levels of the applicant screening process are examined. Additionally, researchers are encouraged to examine the formal education and years of experience

required for other areas of the job market and to publish those findings as they become available. A comprehensive understanding of the current job market provides students, employers, and institutions with a better understanding of how formal education can be tailored to fit the demands of the economy. Furthermore, researchers are encouraged to examine recruitment advertisements in the field of communications in other concentrations not examined within the current study. This includes the field of information technology, upper-management, and additional regions of the United States. Finally, researchers may investigate job posting for higher level positions within the market to examine if the findings of this article remain true for this subset of the job market.

### Practical Applications

An analysis of the results presented in this study provides valuable information about the communications field, job market, hiring processes, and workforce. From the answers to the research questions proposed by this study, graduates of communication studies programs may be able to better understand what is expected of them in the workforce. Additionally, this article developed conclusions about how formal education, educational accreditation, and experience is viewed in the current hiring climate, which may allow employers to more accurately define what characteristics an employer seeks as compared to their competitors in the hiring market. Finally, this study may allow companies seeking to hire a communications manager identify how potential applicants view recruitment advertisements and how an organization’s recruitment advertisements compare to the whole.

### Limitations

Frequency analyses are limited by their ability to be extrapolated. The findings presented herein are limited to the sample investigated. For example, while there is no reason to believe this area of the country presents unique or identifying requirements within its recruitment advertisements, the Midwest region of the United States was studied exclusively and further research should be conducted before making determinations about other areas of the country. From the sample, senior positions were purposefully excluded from the study in order to provide the most relevant information to recent graduates. Therefore, any recruitment advertisement using “senior,” or “upper,” to describe the recruitment advertisement or containing any additional filter indicating a high level of authority within the organization is excluded. Furthermore, any recruitment advertisement including the descriptor “information technology,” “I.T.” or containing any filter indicating an emphasis in information systems was excluded from this study, as the focus of this particular research was the arts and humanities. Finally, no recruitment advertisement



published six months prior to the origination date of this article was used in the qualitative or quantitative analyses.

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## APPENDIX

## The Raw Data Used to Create the Frequency Distributions Produced within the Findings

Position	Company	Years	Education	Accreditatio
Admissions Data and Communications Manager	Mount Mercy University	1	Bachelor	No
Assistant Communications Operations Manager	Air Methods Corporation	0	High School	No
Commerical Banking Communications Manager	Huntington National Bank	7	Bachelor	No
Communication Manager	Invista	5	Bachelor	No
Communication Manager	Becker Underwood	10	Bachelor	No
Communications Center Manager	City of Hays, KS	5	BA or Equivalent	No
Communications Manager	UAW Retiree Medical Benefits Trust	0	Bachelor	No
Communications Manager	Northwestern University	3	BA or Equivalent	No
Communications Manager	United Health Group	3	Bachelor	No
Communications Manager	American Greetings	4	Bachelor	No
Communications Manager	Transamerica Life Insurance Company	5	Bachelor	No
Communications Manager	The Greater Chicago Food Depository	5	Bachelor	No
Communications Manager	Siemens Infrastructure and Cities	7	Bachelor	No
Communications Manager	BMO Harris Bank	7	None	No
Communications Manager	Honeywell	7	Bachelor	No
Communications Manager	Technology Management Solutions	8	Bachelor	No
Communications Manager I	Michigan State University	0	BA or Equivalent	No
Communications Program Manager	American Red Cross	5	Bachelor	No
Communications Project Manager	Bissell Homecare, Inc.	5	Bachelor	No
Communications/Public Relations Manager	Batesville	5	Bachelor	No
Corporate Communications Manager	Molex	8	Bachelor	No
Corporate Communications Manager	Grange Mutual Casualty Company	10	BA or Equivalent	No
District Employee Communications Supervisor	United Postal Service	0	None	No
Employee Engagement Communication Manager	Ace Hardware Corporation	7	Bachelor	No
Executive Communications Manager	Edgepark Medical Supplies	10	Bachelor	No
Manager Communications	John Deere Corporation	2	Bachelor	No
Manager Communications	ConAgra Foods	7	Bachelor	No
Manager Corporate Communications	Meredith	5	Bachelor	No
Manager for Communications	Bridgestar	5	Bachelor	No
Manager of Marketing Communications	MARS	7	Bachelor	No
Manager of Marketing Communications	Wrigley Company	7	Bachelor	No
Manager of Media Relations and Communications	Minnesota Medical Association	5	Bachelor	No
Manager of Organizational Communications	The Ounce	4	Bachelor	No
Manager, Marketing & Communications	Centene Corporation	3	Bachelor	No
Manager, Marketing & Communications	Wright State University	5	Bachelor	No
Manager, Technical Communications	Prudential Global Data Services	5	Bachelor	No
Marketing and Communications Manager	Youth Guidance	3	BA or Equivalent	No
Marketing and Communications Manager	HealthEast Clinics	7	Bachelor	No
Marketing Communications Manager	Recovery Resources Assist Now	3	Bachelor	No
Marketing Communications Manager	HNI Corporation	3	Bachelor	No
Marketing Communications Manager	Biomet	3	Bachelor	No
Marketing Communications Manager	Priority Health	5	Bachelor	No
Marketing Communications Manager	McKinley Group	5	Bachelor	No
Marketing Communications Manager	Watlow	5	Bachelor	No
Marketing/Communications Manager	MichBio	3	Bachelor	No
Media Relations Communication Manager	U.S. Cellular	7	Bachelor	No
Online Communications Manager	Northern Illinois Food Bank	3	Bachelor	No
Public Relations and Communiations Manager	Farm Credit	7	Bachelor	No
Manager, Communications	Sara Lee	5	Bachelor	No
U.S. Communications Manager	Monsanto's Corporate Affairs	10	Bachelor	No
Visual Communications Manager	Victoria's Secret	3	BA or Equivalent	No